

Phoenix Mill
Van Houten and Cianci Streets
Paterson, New Jersey
Passaic County

HAER No. NJ-4

HAER
NJ,
16-PAT,
19-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER
NJ,
16-PAT,
19-

PHOENIX MILL

NJ-4

DATE: ca. 1813, and 1826-27

LOCATION: Van Houten and Cianci Streets
Paterson, New Jersey

DESIGNED BY: unknown

OWNER: Todd Enterprises

SIGNIFICANCE: The Phoenix Mill is the oldest extant structure in the Historic District of Paterson. An 1821 deed describes the original structure on the site which is similar to the existing mill in height and width but not in length. Precise measurement revealed that the walls of the eastern end are thicker than those at the west end, which suggests different dates and methods of construction. Further investigation led to the conclusion that the eastern portion, which measures forty-two by fifty feet, is the building described in the deed and that it dates from ca. 1813. The remaining portion, although externally identical to the original, was constructed some time after the deed was drawn up; probably in 1826 or 1827, shortly after the incorporation of the Phoenix Manufacturing Company under John Travers, Jr. It is possible that the early structure was designed with expansion in mind, for its western end was of frame construction, which facilitated the later addition.

A structure of considerable elegance and style, the Phoenix Mill operated first as a cotton mill and, after the mid-1860s, as a silk mill. Later additions and alterations enabled the manufacture of various machinery and equipment needed in the processing of silk.

TRANSMITTED BY: Monica E. Hawley, Historian, 1983

The Phoenix Mill Lot

The following is the result of a deed search done at the time of the survey:

"Beginning at the northwest corner of Lot No. 7 at the Passaic River, running from thence south 21 degrees and 30 minutes east 340 feet to the canal; thence along the same 100 feet; thence north 68 degrees and 30 minutes west 358 feet to said River; thence along the same up stream there of to the place of beginning."¹

(Hereafter referred to as Phoenix Lot #1, the most westerly of the Phoenix Lots.)

"Beginning at the canal in said Boudinot Street at the corner of lot then unleased, running thence north 22 degrees and 15 minutes west to the said Passaic River; thence up the said River with the courses thereof till it strikes the line of the herebefore described lot; thence south 22 degrees and 15 minutes east along the line of said lot till it strikes the canal; thence along the canal 50 feet to the place of beginning."²

(Hereafter referred to as Phoenix Lot #2.)

"Beginning on the northside of the wall of the canal in said street at the westerly corner of the lot now or formerly occupied by Warren Haight and running westerly along said canal wall fifty feet to the lot heretofore leased by the S. U. M. to said Phoenix Manufacturing Company; thence northerly along the afore- mentioned lot to the south bank of the Passaic River, thence easterly along the bank of said river to the said lot now or formerly occupied by said Warren Haight; thence southerly along the western bounds of said last mentioned lots to the place of beginning"³ (Hereafter referred to as Phoenix Lot #3, the most easterly of the Phoenix Lots.)

His attempt at spinning candlewick in the society's mill having failed, John Parke leased Phoenix Lot # 1 one from the S.U.M. in 1807, and built a frame building for cotton spinning.⁴ Four years later, Parke leased Phoenix Lot #2 from the Society, and with the demands of the War of 1812, rebuilt his factory and enlarged his operation.⁵ The mill was held as collateral for a loan made by the Paterson Bank and Parke was forced to relinquish the property in 1817 in a foreclosure.⁶ The Bank sold the mill to Joaquín J. Vasquez, who used it to produce linen sail canvas, sail twines, etc.⁷ He sold one half of the business to John Travers, Jr. for \$15,000 in 1821, and the two formed a partnership which continued until 1823, when Travers bought Vasquez's share of the business for \$15,000. There exists a complete description and inventory for the factory in 1821 in the Essex County Book of Deeds (E, p. 116-121 & F, p.343.)

The need for additional capital prompted Travers to incorporate the flax mill under the title of the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. to which he sold the leasehold for \$52,600 in 1825. At this time, according to Fisher's census of 1825, the Phoenix housed several other small manufacturers, including Henry Post, a machinist who employed six hands, the chair making and turning establishment of Chauncey Andrews, employing twenty-five, and the cotton mill of Aaron and Robert King which had 1512 spindles, forty-eight employees, consumed twenty hundred weight of cotton weekly, and paid out weekly wages totaling \$106. In the same year Travers flax mill had 1188 spindles, thirty-five looms, and twenty-one power looms in the mill, of which ten were in operation, and 164 employees. The factory consumed three tons of flax weekly, and had twenty-three hand looms employed outside the factory, turning out forty-six bolts of forty yards each in a week. The looms in the factory turned out eighty-six bolts of linen. In 1826, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. completed construction of final section of the present building.

In a census taken two years later, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. had a total capitalization of \$132,000. A second water wheel and sail cloth looms had been added sometime in 1825.⁸ The factory had 1200 spindles, spinning 500,000 lbs. of flax valued at \$60,000 a year. These fed fifty-two power looms and twenty hands looms (all in the factory) producing 328,300 yards of duck yearly with a value of \$128,037. Additionally, about 200 lbs. of linen yarn were exported annually. Employed were eighty-nine men, eighty-one women, and 114 children, paid \$35,000 per year.

According to the 1829 census the Phoenix Mill Lot housed William Jacob's turning shop, which employed fourteen men, the machine shop of Paul and Beggs which also included a blacksmith's shop with three fires and carpenters shop and which employed eighteen hands. By then, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. had 1616 spindles. It consumed 600,000 lbs. of flax annually on forty-nine power looms and twenty-four hand looms, weaving 450,000 yards of duck a year. It also produced 143,000 yards of bagging annually. Two-hundred-sixty hands were employed in the factory, and 135 people were employed weaving outside the factory.

By 1832 Phoenix Manufacturing had divided into a linen duck factory of 1616 spindles, employing 196, and consuming 493,000 lbs. of flax annually, and a cotton mill which had 4132 spindles, employed 250, and processed 312,000 lbs. of cotton a year on thirty-five power looms. Sharing the mill lot with Phoenix was the turning shop of Chauncey Andrews, with three hands, the turning establishment of Jacobs and Andrews, with twenty hands, the turning shop of Furlong and Laird, with ten men, and that of Thomas Riper, employing six. There were also the millwright shop of Paul and Beggs, employing thirty-seven, and the wadding manufactory of Henry Worrel, which consumed 12,000 lbs. of cotton yearly with four workers.

The confinement of weaving to the factory in the mid-1820's is partially attributable to Chauncey Andrews who in 1826 applied a power loom to weaving canvas, and soon the power loom supplanted hand weaving done in the home.⁹

Rendered on a city map of 1835 is Andrews' plant, east of the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. on the north side of Boudinot Street. Andrews' business occupied two buildings; one L shaped, 20'x 60'x 40'x 30', set back 70' from the street. The other was square, 30'x 40', located close to the river (Bankruptcy and inventory of Andrews' shop in 1835)

In 1836, the Phoenix Mfg. Co. leased Phoenix Lot #3, which had previously been leased to Warren Haight from the SUM. Included in the \$600 annual fee was one square foot of water, for a total of 359" for all the Phoenix Lots.¹⁰ After 1836, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. occupied all three of the Phoenix sub lots. The three lots were sold to Roswell Colt in 1840, for part of the \$125,000 he paid to the SUM for several parcels. The day after the purchase, Roswell conveyed the plot to the executors of the estate of his father-in-law, Robert Oliver. In 1844 the firm leased additional 351" of water for a 720" or five square feet total for whole Phoenix Works.¹¹

The 1850 census of New Jersey lists the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. as producing cotton and flax, with \$200,000 invested in its plant. Using 450,000 lbs. of cotton, 300,000 lbs. of flax and 100 tons of coal, the factory had 8000 spindles

and fifty-two looms. The census notes that the factory had not been in operation during the previous eighteen months. In 1854, the company returned to the manufacture of cotton almost exclusively.¹²

In 1858, Phoenix Manufacturing leased lot #3, which had been occupied by first Warren Haight and subsequently William Adams to John van Winkle.¹³ Van Winkle later erected a two-story frame building, 30'x 50' on the lot in violation of the terms of his sub-lease from Phoenix. In an agreement with the Phoenix Co. dated 1861, Van Winkle agreed to surface all outside walls with brick, and "also to extend the tinued roof over the whole".¹⁴

In the 1860 New Jersey Census, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. is listed as producing cotton, duck, and yarn, having \$250,000 invested in the plant, consuming 128,000 lbs. of cotton in the previous year, using water power, with thirty-one male and 110 female workers producing goods worth \$130,636.

Arriving in Paterson from New York City early that year Benjamin B. Tilt, established a silk-throwing plant on the top floor of the Phoenix Mill which he had taken to settle a debt. His products were gum and sewing silks. In 1862, Tilt's son Albert was admitted to a partnership, and the firm became B.B. Tilt and Son. The firm prospered and by 1864 the Tilts occupied parts of the Phoenix, Beaver and the Old Watson Mills. One year later, the Tilts procured a controlling interest in the Phoenix Manufacturing Co., and shifted production from cotton to silk. After five years of their control, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. was producing 39,000 lbs. of silk worth \$468,000 in a year. According to the New Jersey Census of 1870, the Tilt's capitalization of the Phoenix Co. was \$400,000, and with the 120 horsepower produced by a fifty-four inch turbine wheel, 40,725 lbs. of Chinese, Japanese, Italian and French raw silk into "silk fringe". Their fifty-six male, 144 female and 170 child workers operated five winders and spinners of fifty-six spools each, ten cleaners of fifty-six spools each, forty dumblers of fifty-six pools each, seventy-two spindles, four spoolers, and fifty winders of fifty-six spools each and 16,000 spindles. The total wages paid by the firm in a year was \$69,000.

Trumbull notes that "Additions were made to the Phoenix Mill from time to time until there were facilities to not only manufacture everything in the line of silk goods but to build the machinery wherewith to do the work, some of the very best looms and other machinery in use being built on the premises." In 1874, the company purchased Lots #1 and #2 which they had been leasing up to this time.¹⁵ from the descendants of Roswell and Margaret Colt for \$2,333.33¹⁵. The next year, the Van Winkle machine shop on Lot #3 burned, and John Van Winkle surrendered his lease on the property to the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. for \$12,000.¹⁶ The shop was rebuilt for silk manufacturing purposes, and the Van Winkle shop was incorporated into the Phoenix Company, occupying the lower floor of the old Phoenix Mill, and using the patterns from the Van Winkle shop to manufacture machinery for silk processing. Henry Van Winkle, John's son, became superintendent of the new subsidiary manufactory. The front portion of the newly expanded premises was remodeled, and new structure erected, corresponding with the "elder Phoenix" in the rear, in 1881. The plant employed 800, receiving a \$260,000 annual payroll, who used 3,000 lbs. of raw silk weekly to manufacture products worth \$1,450,000 per annum. Power was supplied by one turbine of 140 horsepower, and two 60-horsepower steam engines.¹⁷ The company spun silk yarn at its Adelaide Silk Works in Allentown, Pennsylvania to be woven at its plant on Van Houten Street.

In 1892, at a meeting of the board of directors, the Phoenix Manufacturing Co. changed its corporate label to the Phoenix Silk Manufacturing Co., reflecting the change in product since Travers had begun spinning cotton under the Phoenix title in 1825. In 1919, Benard Grobart bought Lots #1 and #2 outright from the Phoenix company, and secured their lease on Lot #3.¹⁸ Ownership of Lot #3, once owned by Roswell Colt, had been divided up among various descendants: eventually parts passing through the hands on men such as August Belmont, the financier and head of the American office of the House of Rothschild, and subsequently to Lady Steele, widow of General Sir Thomas Montagu Steele, K.C.B.¹⁹ The entire #3 Lot was acquired by the New Jersey General Security Corporation in 1915²⁰ who sold it to the SUM in 1930.²¹

FOOTNOTES

1. Randal B. Lewis, "Abstract of the title of the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures as to Phoenix Mill Lot", p. 1.
2. Randal B. Lewis, "Abstract of the title of Meyer Grobart, et. als., as to Premises situate on Van Houten Street, in the City of Paterson, New Jersey, known as the Phoenix Mills", p. 1
3. Ibid., p.1.
4. Essex Deeds, C 240.
5. Essex Deeds, C 238.
6. Essex Deeds, C 244.
7. Essex Deeds, C 242, Trumbull, p. 55.
8. Essex Deeds, 350-60.
9. Trumbull, p. 268.
10. Passaic Deeds. I 378.
11. Passaic Deeds, D 198, 244.
12. Trumbull, p. 55.
13. Passaic Book B, misc., 198.
14. Passaic Book B, misc. 322.
15. Passaic Deeds, A-5, 483.
16. Passaic Deeds, L-5, 427.
17. Trumbull, p. 227.
18. Passaic Deeds, Z-27, p. 60.
19. Passaic Deeds, X-8, p. 502; H-12, p. 132.
20. Passaic Deeds, L-25, p. 258.
21. Passaic Deeds, E-36, p. 392.

Addendum to:
Phoenix Mill
Van Houten and Cianci Streets
Paterson, New Jersey
Passaic County

HAER No. NJ-4

HAER
NJ,
10-PAT,
19-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240